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TAGS: [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [ASEAN](#) [ID](#) [BM](#)  
SUBJECT: INDONESIAN FOREIGN POLICY -- INFLUENTIAL EXPERT  
CALLS FOR "POST-ASEAN" APPROACH

REF: JAKARTA 1628

Classified By: Pol/C Joseph L. Novak, reasons 1.4(b+d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: One of Indonesia's leading foreign affairs commentators has called for the GOI to pursue a "post-ASEAN" foreign policy. Rizal Sukma, the influential director of Jakarta's Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), argued in an October 5 op-ed that the G-20 is creating an opportunity for Indonesia to show greater leadership. Taking advantage of this requires freeing Indonesia somewhat from ASEAN and building strong ties with countries such as the U.S. Sukma's views stem in part from frustration over how he believes ASEAN has constrained a more aggressive regional approach on Burma. The op-ed also likely reflects some of the behind-the-scenes debates regarding priorities in President Yudhoyono's next term, which begins on October 20. END SUMMARY.

URGING INDONESIA TO GO BEYOND ASEAN

¶2. (U) Indonesia should take greater advantage of the opportunities created by the emergence of an international order centered on the G-20. This, according to an op-ed by Rizal Sukma, a foreign affairs expert who frequently advises the Presidential Palace and other senior GOI officials. In an October 5 op-ed in the "Jakarta Post," Indonesia's leading English-language daily, Sukma hailed the increasing prominence of the G-20 as an opportunity for developing countries like Indonesia to exercise greater global leadership. To exercise such leadership, Sukma urges Indonesia to look beyond its traditional foreign policy horizons in Southeast Asia. (Note: The full text of Sukma's piece is included in paragraph 8.)

¶3. (U) Sukma recommends a number of policy changes necessary for Indonesia to take advantage of this evolving global context. Indonesia must make the G-20 central to its foreign policy-making. The country must also balance its traditional focus on multilateral diplomacy with a heightened focus on bilateral ties with key countries, including the United States, Japan, China, the ROK, Australia and India. Developing formal partnerships--such as that under development with the United States and other countries--is a key step in this effort.

¶4. (U) Indonesia must be prepared to act independently of ASEAN when it serves the country's national interests, Sukma counsels. That said, he acknowledges the importance of Indonesia working with neighbors Singapore and Malaysia, and fellow-democracies Thailand and the Philippines. While he steps back from abandoning ASEAN all together, Sukma firmly knocks the regional organization from its central place in Indonesian policy-making.

AN ONGOING DEBATE

15. (C) Sukma's op-ed reflects an ongoing debate within the Indonesian foreign policy establishment and a likely struggle over the direction of policy-making during President Yudhoyono's next term. Over the past few years, a cohort of Indonesian "ASEAN skeptics" has emerged, including Sukma and other experts at CSIS as well as some members of the Indonesian Parliament. The skeptics charge that ASEAN's consensus-based decision making constrains Indonesia's leadership of the region. Sukma has frequently told Mission interlocutors of his frustration over ASEAN's blocking of a more aggressive regional approach to promoting reform in Burma. That frustration apparently helped fuel the approach outlined in the op-ed. While no prominent expert has called for Indonesia to withdraw from the regional organization, skeptics like Sukma urge that Indonesian leaders should make policy with less concern for the views of other ASEAN members.

16. (C) However, other foreign policy leaders, including many of the senior officials at the Department of Foreign Affairs (DEPLU), remain committed to ASEAN's central place in Indonesian foreign policy. They still hold fast to Indonesia's traditional multilateralism and are loathe to interfere in what they regard as the internal affairs of other states. For them, ASEAN remains a comfortable place for Indonesia to exercise cautious and limited leadership on regional issues.

17. (C) At this point it is unclear which view will have the upper hand in shaping Indonesian policy over the coming

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years. Given President Yudhoyono's cautious approach, we are unlikely to see any dramatic change in Indonesia's policy toward ASEAN. That said, FM Wirajuda's increasingly strong rhetoric on Burma might presage a more assertive Indonesian toward some regional issues (see reftel) .

TEXT OF OP-ED

18. (U) The text of Rizal Sukma's op-ed follows:

Begin text:

A Post-ASEAN Foreign Policy for a Post-G8 World

Rizal Sukma  
The Jakarta Post  
Monday, October 5, 2009

It has long been predicted that international relations of the 21st century would be different from those in the 20th century. And, recently, that prediction has become closer to reality when leaders of G-20, meeting in Pittsburgh, agreed to elevate the forum into a more strategic level, signaling the end of a world dominated by eight developed countries (The G8). The fate and the future shape of global politics are now increasingly defined by both developed and developing countries. We are now entering a G-20 world.

Being a member of the G-20, Indonesia is part of that strategic transformation. This is an opportunity too valuable to be missed. It opens up a whole new range of possibilities for our efforts in redefining our place within the international community. It reinforces the question whether the current foreign policy format, which still treats Southeast Asia and ASEAN as the first concentric circle, is still adequate. A new world requires a new foreign policy. It is time to recognize that we need a post-ASEAN foreign policy for a post-G8 world.

So, what does a post-ASEAN foreign policy for Indonesia entail? First, Indonesia should reinforce faithfully the true spirit of bebas-aktif (free and active) foreign policy

as envisioned by the founders of the Republic. Indonesia's foreign policy under the stewardship of President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono and Minister Hassan Wirayuda has done this, but the point needs to be emphasized further. Indonesia should free itself from any undeserving obligation to follow the wishes of any state or a grouping of states, including ASEAN, if doing so would sacrifice our own national interests.

Recently, Indonesia has begun to demonstrate a degree of autonomy vis a vis ASEAN. We are no longer hesitant to take a different position from other ASEAN countries if we have to. We should not let ourselves become the one who should always make compromises. But, we should not feel uncomfortable if our position would mean the absence of consensus, and therefore the absence of agreement. That is the true meaning of a bebas-aktif foreign policy.

Second, Indonesia needs to re-define the theory of "concentric circles" which guides the conduct of its foreign policy. Instead of emphasizing the geographical aspect of the concept--which defines Southeast Asia and ASEAN as the first and most important concentric circle or foreign policy theater for Indonesia--Indonesia should also incorporate other dimensions such as strategic necessity, functionality, values, and identity as parameters for defining the arena where it should pursue its national interests.

In terms of strategic necessity, for example, countries like Singapore, Malaysia, Japan, Australia, China, India and the United States are far more important to Indonesia than any other countries, and should form the first concentric circle of foreign relations. In functional terms, layers of the circle should be defined according to issues at hand. The G-20 should also be part of our foreign policy's first concentric circle. Due to shared values in democracy, our relations with democratic countries need to be enhanced. And, identity as a moderate Muslim-majority nation would also oblige us to play a more active role in the Muslim world.

Third, Indonesia needs to balance its commitment to multilateralism with that of bilateralism in the conduct of foreign relations. We need to give more emphasis to certain bilateral relationship within and outside ASEAN. Within ASEAN, we need to deepen our relations with Malaysia and

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Singapore (for strategic necessity) and with Philippines and Thailand (for shared values in democracy). Outside ASEAN, we need to strengthen our "strategic" or "comprehensive" partnership with global and regional major powers, especially the US, Japan, Australia, India, South Korea, and China.

Fourth, Indonesia should also identify its international position closer to the Asia-Pacific region. By doing so, its foreign policy horizon would be expanded and new opportunities and initiatives would be possible. The way we see our self, and define our place within the international system, would enlighten us in our search for new ways to pursue our national interests. The most important agenda in this regard is to take part in shaping the emerging regional architecture in the region.

Fifth, a post-ASEAN foreign policy does not mean that we need to abandon ASEAN. But, we need to treat ASEAN for what it really is, namely, as an organization incapable of moving beyond what it is meant for: preserving regional stability and security by maintaining good inter-state relations among member states. We should continue to persuade ASEAN to change for the better, but we need not waste our energy if other members are erecting all the barriers, and doing whatever they can, to ensure that such noble idea remains an illusion and unattainable. We should work through ASEAN whenever we need to, push for a certain agenda whenever we can, and go beyond it whenever we must.

In short, a post-ASEAN foreign policy for Indonesia is not an

"extra-ASEAN" foreign policy as some would suggest. That still connotes the strategic centrality of ASEAN in our foreign policy, while others are merely "extra". It is a new direction for Indonesia's foreign policy in which ASEAN is no more important, if not less, than other venues such as the G-20. It is a blueprint for Indonesia to follow if it does not want to always punch below its weight. It is a platform for a democratic Indonesia to strengthen its relevance amidst rapid strategic and geopolitical transformation in the Asia-Pacific and beyond. President Yudhoyono's second administration is in a position to do just that.

End text.

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